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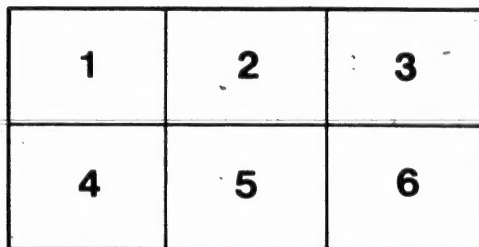
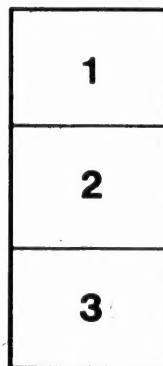
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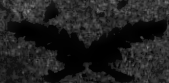
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A Bear Up Stairs



By H. N. D. Antientab, N. S.

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A Bear Up Stairs

(A thrilling story about a naughty little girl, by M. M. D. Antigonish).

There were a good many things, I am sorry to say, that Girlie Grant, hated to do, but above all the things she hated to do, was washing dishes.

Girlie, with her parents and only brother Angus, had moved to a farm about ten miles from the city, where the two children were born.

Girlie was twelve years old at that time, and Angus sixteen.

It was a beautiful place, where they made their new home. A broad shiny river flowed gracefully through the centre of the farm. This river was bridged across, half a mile below their house. Above their home there was a sloping hill, where the cattle grazed contentedly, and where in the spring-time the little lambs skipped and frolicked among the young trees, where the robins built their nests and reared their young unmolested, and sang their morning, and evening songs. Beyond the pasture for miles all was timberland. Bears, and other wild animals were known to inhabit these woods, tho the settlers below were not troubled by them.

There was a small clearing, however about a mile above the pasture, where a couple of lumbermen had worked the previous winter, and had built a shanty.

Girlie Grant and her brother found this shanty late one afternoon while hunting for the cows which had got away from the pasture.

Girlie got fairly struck on this "Little house in the woods," as she called it and coaxed Angus to open the storm door. The windows being boarded on the outside and closed to within an inch of the bottom, they couldn't see through.

Angus promised they would come some other day, and explore when he had more time, but Girlie was not satisfied. She made up her mind to go back the next day, even if she had to go alone.

Early on the following morning, Nancy Smith, Mrs. Grant's housemaid was called away to her home, a few miles distant, by the sudden illness of her mother.

It happened that Mr. Grant had hired a few men to come and help him that day to gather and draw a lot of hay, which he had cut on the other side of the river. The day being very warm, Mrs. Grant who was not feeling well, found it hard to do much extra work. She tried to get Girlie to help her, but Girlie was not a bit inclined to do so. You see, there was a certain plan forming inside her brown curly head which kept her busy and distracted, and when she saw the pile of dishes to be

washed after dinner was over, she fairly revolted. She kicked and pouted making her poor mother so miserable that she had to leave her work at last and lie down.

Girle then slipped out doors and made her way up towards the pasture. When she got to the fence she slid through the wooden bars and scooted along till she came to the rough path leading to the clearing in the woods.

My! but how she ran up that path, her heart going pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat, till she got to the little shanty.

With trembling fingers she tried to open the storm door, but the latch was rusty and wouldn't budge.

Locking around she saw a sharp hardwood stick. With this she pried open the latch, swinging back the door till it rested against the wall on the outside. To her joy, she found the inside door unlocked, and went in. It was nice and cool in there.

A rusty stove stood near the wall. There was a broom there, also some dishes on a crude shelf.

Leading to a hole about three feet square in one corner of the ceiling, a short heavy ladder stood against the wall. Up this ladder Girle flew like a squirrel. "Phew! its warm up here," she said. It was warm there, although the two windows one on each side, were also up about an inch.

Girle tried to raise them higher, but they were stuck too fast. She could not move them.

"I will do my down-stairs work first," she thought, climbing down quick as a mouse, and with joyful energy she fell to work.

Finding an old pot, half full of rain-water outside, she carried it in and taking down the dishes she washed them, drying them with a dirty towel.

In her careless selfish way she actually forgot how she hated washing dishes, not even giving a thought to her poor sick mother at home or the work to be done there.

Brushing the shelf with the broom she put the dishes away, swept the floor and tidied up wonderfully.

"Now, I must do my upstairs work," she said climbing up the ladder.

A partition ran halfway across the loft floor, with a bed on each side. There was a blanket or two on a chair, also a heavy quilt.

It was evident that the lumbermen intended to return to work the following winter by the few articles of furniture left there.

After straightening up the beds as best she could, Girle flew around picking up before sweeping, an old shoe here, an empty bag there, old socks, and things like that.

These she threw into an empty barrel. Not being used to work, she soon tired, and sat on the floor to rest, when suddenly a shadow darkened both windows.

Girlie jumped to her feet just as a sharp flash of lightning pierced the darkening room, followed by a loud crash of thunder. Girlie was very much afraid of thunder. She tried to shut the windows tight but as before they wouldn't budge.

Throwing herself face down on a bed and pulling a blanket over her head, she lay there, with wild-beating heart, the perspiration streaming down her face and body, while peal after peal of thunder threatened to crush the little shanty.

Gracious! How Girlie wished she was home then. How she wished she had never come to that shanty.

By and by the thunder growled away. But when Girlie looked around she saw that the place was almost pitch dark. At that moment a sharp tap sounded on the roof, above her head, followed by another, and another. She sprang out of bed, and ran to the window wondering what it was, and saw that it was hail.

My! but how those hailstones spilled from the sky.

Girlie watched them, fascinated, as they bobbed and danced on the ground below her, some rattling on the window sill, and popping into the room.

But had Girlie known it, the biggest and most awful danger that ever was, was fast approaching her.

For happening to look up in the direction of the woods. She discerned two black objects moving along at the edge of the clearing, about a hundred yards above the shanty.

At first she took them to be two of her father's young cattle, but as they drew nearer she could see them plainer, and was horrified to know them to be two great, big, bears.

Girlie Grant knelt at that window, transfixed, watching the bears shambling hurriedly towards her.

She was fairly paralyzed.

Then a terrible thought struck her, the shock of it almost knocking her over. Supposing—merciful heaven! The door was wide open down stairs. Supposing the bears should come inside—nay might even climb up stairs, and eat her up.

They were very near now.

Panic-stricken, Girlie reeled around. What was she to do? She had no time to reach the door, to close it, for she knew the bears would get there ahead of her.

She thought of the ladder. If she could pull it up stairs, that might save her, but the ladder was too heavy for her to do that.

As a last resort she grabbed the broom laid it across

the hatch-way throwing the heavy quilt over it, almost tumbling down head first as the two bears shuffled into the shanty.

Girlie was so weak from fright now, that she had to lie down on the floor. No words can describe her feelings as she realized her peril. After a short time her curiosity getting the better of her, she wriggled along cautiously till she got to a narrow crack between two of the boards.

Peering through there, she could see the bears, standing in the middle of the floor, dripping and panting, less than seven feet below her.

Terrific thoughts chased one another through her half numb brain. What if the bears would not go out before night? Or should they go, what if they were to go in the direction of the pasture, and lie in wait for her if she started for home?

She was tortured by such thoughts as these, as she lay there not daring to move a hand or a foot, for at the least noise the bears would growl threateningly, turning their eyes this way and that way, and often in the direction of the ladder.

At last the sun came out clear and hot. Birds began to chirp joyously amidst the brushwood and shrubs around the shanty. Girlie's heart began to beat hopefully, but not for long for at that moment, something happened. It was the most terrible thing of all. It fairly took Girlie's breath away, and as she thought, also, her eyesight. Bang! The wind had veered towards the west, caught the storm door of the shanty, and slammed it shut.

Should Girlie Grant live for a million years she would not forget that awful moment, when she found herself imprisoned in the lumbermen's shanty, with two big bears, which at any minute might climb up stairs, and eat her alive. For at the noise of the slamming door they jumped wildly, overturning the stove. Such a hullaballo, Girlie never heard in her life.

She saw the quilt over the hatchway shake as the bears bumped against the ladder in the corner.

Girlie turned sick, she wanted to vomit but she didn't dare. At the risk of her life she staggered around the end of the partition and threw herself on the bed, on that side.

She did not lay there long, when an awful, thought came to her mind. It was the fearfullest, fearfullest, yet. Certainly they were sure to search for her at home, and Angus would recall the incident of the previous afternoon, regarding the lumbermen's shanty. Positively! That would be the first place they would come to, she reasoned.

For the first time in her life, Girlie Grant forgot her own self in the danger threatening anyone opening the shanty door.

Half blindly, she crawled from the bed smothering back the sobs that she knew would attract the bears' attention. She

must get to the window across the floor, and warn off anyone coming to the door.

In a fit of despair, she cried out, shrilly as she flew across the floor: "I don't care for myself, I don't care if the bears would eat me, it would serve me right."

A terrible growl from below, which she took to be—"You're r-r-right," was her answer.

As Girlie knelt at the window almost above the outside door, she prayed as she never prayed before.

"Dear God," she moaned, "please keep me alive so that I can save Angus for he is sure to come looking for me."

"Oh! why did I ever come to this place?" she prayed, and promised, and vowed that she would never, never, disobey her mother again, if she once got home alive.

All this time the bears kept stamping and snarling impatiently below. After, what seemed to her ages, she saw her brother coming along towards the shanty. Oh joy of joys when he got near enough to hear her calling to him, she screamed out excitedly!

"Keep away! keep away! oh Angus dear, don't go near that door. For heaven's sake, don't go near the door. There are two bears in there—two great big bears."

It was a minute or two before she got her brother convinced of the truth. At first he feared that she had lost her mind to talk like that.

Calling to her brother to run around to the window on the other side of the shanty, and tiptoeing across the floor herself, Girlie explained her predicament. For a few minutes Angus and she tried to plan a way to get her outside, without avail.

As I should have mentioned before now, Angus carried a gun on his shoulder, and a stout stick in his hand.

"I'll tell you what I can do," he exclaimed briskly. "I will pull a board off one of the windows, and fire at the bears from outside, or shall I run off and get someone to help?" "No. No. No. Angus dear" Girlie sobbed. "Oh Angus dear don't leave me here alone with the bears. Oh—oh—oh—what am I going to do? How can I ever get out of this place?"

"Never mind Girlie," her brother coaxed cheerily: "Just wait till I fix those two bears."

He ran around to one of the windows, tore off the narrowest board and in a jiffy was back again.

"You watch out," he called to his sister. "There is going to be some fun in a minute."

But neither Girlie nor her brother saw much fun in what followed.

When Angus got back to the window, the bears were furious, advancing towards him with vicious eyes, and snarling snorts. Angus waited coolly for a chance to shoot while Girlie crouched tremblingly peering through between the boards of the partition. From her position she could see the covered hatchway in the corner. Also the window above the door. There was a flash—a report—with a scream of terror the two bears leaped upwards, one of them striking heavily against the ceiling, then tumbled down in a heap at the front of the ladder.

With terrified eyes, and sinking heart, Girlie Grant saw the quilt over the hatchway shiver, and with the broom, disappear down stairs. But the worst of all was yet to come. Before Angus had a chance to fire again the other bear which was tearing madly below, leaped on the carcass of its now dead mate, and in another second, landed up stairs.

An agonizing cry from her brother reached Girlie's fast deafening ears as from a long distance.

This cry was followed by a loud smashing crash, which she did not hear at all.

Angus Grant heard that crash, and partly comprehended its meaning. Though trembling from head to foot, his face the color of chalk, he charged bravely around towards the door.

There, amidst broken glass, splinters of wood, and splashes of blood, quivering in its death-struggles lay the second bear.

It had plunged through the up-stairs window, got tangled in the sash, coming down on its head, breaking its neck.

By a lucky chance, the bear had fallen a few feet from the doorway, thus giving Angus a chance to get inside, which he did in short order. Unheeding of the horrid, grinning heap, at the front of the ladder, Angus bounded upstairs, calling to his sister as he went, but getting no response.

In his bewilderment it took him a few minutes to find her where she lay limp and pale, between the partition and the bed, apparently dead. Angus picked her up, as if she were a doll, and carried her to the broken window, where the cool, fresh air soon revived her.

When she recovered her strength sufficiently to converse with her brother, he told her how their father and himself ran home when the storm started, fearing her mother and she would be frightened. How their mother nearly lost her senses when she saw that Girlie was not with them, and their father couldn't leave her, and how he started off in search of her, the other men having taken refuge in the barn; (the barn was on the other side of the river), and that the first place which occurred to him was the little shanty in the woods, where he was

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happy to find her, notwithstanding her precarious circumstances. Then Angus went below and dragged the two dead bears over behind the shanty and covered them with the old quilt.

After that the children got home safe.

Angus Grant lived to be an old man, but regarded as the happiest incident of his life, the moment when his sister Girlie opened her eyes that evening in the lumbermen's shanty.

As for Girlie herself, needless to say she was a changed girl after that. Obedient and self-sacrificing she endeared herself to all who knew her, as she never, never, forgot the severe lesson she was taught that fateful afternoon when through her laziness and disobedience, she came to find herself imprisoned in the little house in the woods, with two great-big-bears.

